

February 6, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the State and Local Government Committee. My name is Jessie Ocasio, and I am an investigative worker at the Lewiston Maine DHHS office. I am writing to you in support of LD2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions.

The Lewiston DHHS office has an all-time high number of vacancies, and this is making it extremely difficult for the workers there to work safely and effectively. I have been employed in this office since 2019 and have never seen reports and vacancies this high. The high workloads, and number of vacancies cause me and my coworkers to work late and we are exhausted.

The number of caseworkers who leave after a short amount of time is also concerning. This causes a ripple effect and effects the efficiency of the caseworkers being able to fully assess child safety with our Maine families. I have heard numerous times that the caseworkers do not get paid enough to do the work we do.

I believe closing the pay gap will greatly assist retention and recruiting in our office, our department, and throughout state government. If the wages are higher and brought to a fairer rate, more qualified social workers/professionals willing join this workforce and be more willing to do the extreme work required for our positions. We need additional investments and resources from the state so DHHS can better serve the people who depend on our work.

I am writing to ask that you support LD2121.

Sincerely,

Jessie Ocasio  
Dixfield, Maine